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SUBJECT: FRENCH EFFORTS TO CALM LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER
TENSIONS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The French believe their quick intervention with Hizballah and with Lebanese authorities, following back-to-back border incidents in southern Lebanon in July, has helped to calm the situation. The incidents and their Ambassador's meetings have also reinforced for them the importance of UNIFIL working in lock step with Lebanese Armed Forces in any intervention, to avoid misunderstandings. Hizballah spokesman Musawi expressed pessimism about the prospects for Lebanese government formation, blaming outside parties who are opposed to what he called "creative" formulas. The French also asked the Israelis to react to recent developments in southern Lebanon with caution and moderation. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C/NF) Reading from French reporting cables, Elysee acting Middle East advisor Damien Loras provided on July 24 the following readout of French efforts to calm the border situation. French Ambassador to Lebanon Parrant called on Hizballah spokesman Musawi to register strong misgivings about the handling of arms discovered in Kherbet Salm and reaction to a new Israeli observation post (Far Sheba). He stressed that the weapons cache and Hizballah's obstruction of UNIFIL efforts to deal with it were both a violation of UNSCR 1701. The French rejected Musawi's story that the weapons found at Kherbet Salm pre-dated the fighting and truce of 2006. They also rejected Hizballah allegations that UNIFIL action had been uncoordinated with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), pointing out that UNIFIL had delayed action from July 14 to August 18 in order to ensure LAF participation in the action.

¶3. (C/NF) The Ambassador acknowledged that setting up the Israeli observation post might have been inappropriate but did not violate 1701; however, Hizballah should have exercised responsibility and prevented the civilian population from crossing the blue line, which was a violation. On Lebanese politics in general, Musawi had been pessimistic about forming the new government, claiming that regional parties were opposed to creative formulas. He told the Ambassador that Hizballah is open to a number of formulations (15 majority, 10 opposition and 5 to be chosen by the President or 14-10-6 or 13-10-7), any of which would preclude an absolute majority.

¶4. (C) In a separate conversation with the Ambassador, Lebanese leader Nabih Berri (and Amal party chief) agreed that the weapons found in Kerbet Selm were new and constituted a violation. Furthermore, Berri said he had asked the LAF to be more active working with UNIFIL. On the other hand, Berri argued that the civilian protest against the Israeli outpost was spontaneous. Amal had sent a party rep to the incident and followed up to ensure that there will be no further demonstrations.

¶5. (C) The French Ambassador thinks Hizballah took an aggressive stance because it was caught red-handed with new

weapons. He strongly believes that UNIFIL and the LAF need to be linked up earlier in future operations to ensure the legitimacy of UNIFIL. He planned to call on newly elected Saad Hariri July 23 to follow up.

¶6. (C) Acting MFA Middle East Director Jean-Christophe Paucele told us in a separate conversation that the French asked the Israelis to react to recent developments in southern Lebanon with caution and moderation. In delivering his demarche, the French Ambassador in Tel Aviv expressed sympathy for the Israeli interpretation of events: "We didn't exactly say we share the Israeli view, but we did tell them that we believe Hizbollah violated Resolution 1701."
PEKALA